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ABSTRACT

The process of establishing the vertical file for a new branch library is traced; suggestions for making the vertical file a better resource are offered; and guidelines covering the general objective, responsibility for selection and maintenance, principles of selection, and scope of the collection for vertical files are presented. A four-item bibliography provides a listing of relevant material. (KM)

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THE VERITCAL FILE

by

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Mesa Public Library

September 1986

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VERTICAL FILE

One of the most neglected areas of library reference service is the vertical file. Librarians often shun this excellent resource because it becomes a catchall of odd material, most of which is either outdated or difficult to access. Furthermore, the vertical file is usually relegated to some remote corner of the library far from the reference area.

Why is there a perennial problem with the vertical file? A number of factors could contribute to it. Perhaps the file has not been weeded with regularity. Perhaps the subject headings are poorly chosen or no longer relevant. If the vertical file was established as an afterthought there may be no standards for selection or any valid measures for use. And if the file was not maintained by a designated staff member, but filled with a hodgepodge of materials by everyone, it could be untidy and unwieldy to use.

At the Mesa Public Library many of these factors were considered before setting up the vertical file for the new Dobson Ranch Branch. First, a conference was held with the vertical file librarian at the Main Library to discuss various approaches--from contacting pamphlet vendors and suppliers to the physical size of the file, the subject headings, the scope of materials needed, and the most used subject areas. The vertical file librarian and

the reference staff were valuable help in this phase of the planning, contributing both suggestions and time freely. Second, a selection policy and guidelines were written for the file.

The librarian in charge of the project read background material on the vertical file (see Bibliography), and then spoke with the branch librarian who determined the budget for the project and the supplies needed. These items included a three drawer legal-size file cabinet, file folders, labels for the folders, post cards, temporary file boxes for the materials until the move was made to the new branch building, 3" x 5" cards for subject headings and a file box for the cards.

Comparisons were made between the subject headings in the Vertical File Index, the vertical file in the Main Library and LC headings which the Mesa Public Library uses in cataloging. It was decided the most simple and straightforward headings would be used at first and others added later as needed. "See" and "See Also" references were included.

In appropriating materials, the Vertical File Index was consulted for free items to send away for, then the vertical file in the Main Library was examined to locate articles and clippings to be photocopied, pamphlets to write away for, and addresses of organizations who could supply information. Telephone calls were also made to local organizations and groups for materials.

Other possible sources for vertical file materials are local newspapers, chambers of commerce, the Monthly Catalog of U.S.

Government Publications and the Consumer Information Catalog. City, state and federal departments, commissions and agencies will supply free materials as will the armed forces. Local organizations and groups, businesses and corporations, schools, colleges and universities all publish pamphlet material. Many journals have columns about free and inexpensive materials to send for. Finally, the Encyclopedia of Associations, pamphlet jobbers, and the telephone directory yellow and blue pages will yield numerous other sources.

After each item was acquired the following had to be done: 1. Assign the appropriate subject heading; 2. Type the subject on the file folder label; 3. Affix the label to the folder; 4. Write the subject on each item in red ink with the letters "VF" followed by the month and year; 5. Type two subject cards for the file--one for the vertical file librarian's authority file box and one for the reference area file box.

The following are a few suggestions to make the vertical file a better resource.

Have written guidelines about the file which include its size, growth, staff allocation and budget. Ideally, one staff member should be responsible for the file with time for its duties each week. This person should orient the other staff members about the vertical file, find out from them which reference questions are frequently asked, and whether the reference process can be augmented by vertical file material.

Assigning subject headings is important for ease of access. Use whatever fits the library and its patrons best--LC, Sears, Readers Guide, etc., and make file cards for the headings used, or store the list on a computer program.

Weed the vertical file on a regular basis. More than once a year is helpful to keep the file small enough to manage and to get rid of outdated materials and subject headings. By dating all materials as received weeding becomes easier to do. If time permits, mark each file with a hash mark or other notation as it is used to determine which subjects are in demand most frequently or which need to include more information.

With regular, thorough care the vertical file can be an important asset to reference services in most any library. The Dobson Ranch Branch of the Mesa Public Library uses the following guidelines which are revised annually.

VERTICAL FILE GUIDELINES

I. General Objective

The objective of the vertical file is to serve as an adjunct to general and reference collections by providing necessary and ephemeral information to the community.

II. Responsibility for Selection and Maintenance

The responsibility for selection and maintenance of the vertical file shall lie with one designated professional staff member. The general public and other staff can also recommend items for inclusion.

III. Principles of Selection

In selection, the librarian will try to present a variety of viewpoints on controversial issues, assess community needs and the needs of special needs groups, try to keep pace with new trends and interests as well as acquiring some items of permanent value.

The following principles apply to selection:

- A. Contemporary significance or permanent value
- B. Accuracy of work
- C. Authority of author
- D. Relation of work to existing collection
- E. Price, format and ease of use
- F. Scarcity of information in subject area
- G. Availability of material elsewhere in community
- H. Popular demand
- I. Duplication of materials already in collection

IV. Scope of Collection

The overall collection will be developed to provide necessary information for the community. It will be broad in nature to try to encompass many informational needs and a diversity of thought, but not exhaustive.

A. Types of Materials

1. The vertical file will house maps, pamphlets, flyers, folded posters, catalogs, newsletters, transcripts, bulletins, newspaper clippings, reprints, travel leaflets, etc.
2. The file will exclude periodicals of more than one issue, books, mounted pictures, biographies, and pamphlets of more than 75 pages.

B. Size of File

The vertical file will be limited to a three drawer legal size file cabinet in the reference area.

C. Treatment of Materials

1. The letters "VF", followed by the month/year will be written on each item in red ink.
2. The subject heading will be written at the top of each item in red ink.
3. All newspaper clippings which are to be permanent additions should be mounted.
4. If the source of the item is known it should be noted on the material.

D. Subject Headings

1. Subject headings will follow as closely as possible those LC headings used in the Main Library's vertical file.
2. Two 3" x 5" cards will be made for each heading chosen.
 - a. One for the vertical file librarian's authority card box.
 - b. One for the public vertical file box.

3. "See" and "See Also" references will be made as needed.

4. Filing will be alphabetical by subject heading.

E. Weeding

1. The vertical file shall be weeded at least once a year and ideally every six months.

2. The vertical file librarian will evaluate, analyze and replace materials as needed.

3. The librarian will reorder and replace lost or stolen materials.

4. Damaged, outdated, superseded items will be discarded.

F. Sources of Materials

The following are just a few of the sources available for vertical file materials:

1. Vertical File Index

2. Newspapers

3. Federal, state and local government

4. Other agencies or organizations with free materials

5. Magazine columns, e.g. Library Journal

6. Pamphlet vendor services

G. Circulation

1. All vertical file materials will circulate unless otherwise marked.

2. One item only will be placed in each pamphlet folder and checked out at the circulation desk.

3. Patrons are limited to one VF item per circulation.

4. Check out period is the same as the loan for books.

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